

**Mennonite Creation Care Network
Creation Care Council Meeting Minutes
March 28-29, 2014**

1. **Devotional:** Luke read from Psalm 16 and commented on the goodness of God displayed in these verses in contrast to the severe figure some of us grew up with. Much of the Psalm contains nature imagery depicting God's presence in nature, even violent nature. For a nonwestern mind, the home mentioned is the earth.

2. **Sharing on creation care activities:** *We were asked to bring an artifact to represent a current involvement.*

Dave Hockman Wert: Dave has had the chance to do more fieldwork in his job than usual. He showed a video he shot of Chinook salmon spawning. This was in an area where they could not have been before a dam had been removed.

Joanne visited the Ignatius Jesuit Center where they have built a stations of the cosmos, arranged in a spiral. Spiritual direction infiltrated by ecology. Have land turning into old growth forest. Calling it a 200-year project.

Janie brought a sweet potato. Over the past year, she and Luke made a pact not to buy any meat that wasn't from the farmer's market. Due to the high cost of grass-fed meat, sweet potatoes have become a meat substitute.

Greg showed a sprig of red osier dogwood and a bottle of honey that was still warm when he received it from a farmer friend. Part of his work tries to make space for young farmers. He reflected on bee challenges from pesticides.

Jennifer: Played the song, Colony Collapse Disorder by Anabaptist Beastiary, a group that writes original music about or in the voice of animals. Jennifer's metaphor for doing theology involves bees dancing to show each other where the flowers are.

Chris Meyer (guest speaker) showed a picture of planting trees. He has bought land that was strip mined and is working to heal it by planting trees. His grandparents, Art and Jocele Meyer, did something similar in the 1980s, and his land is adjacent to theirs.

Marlisa brought a piece of asphalt from a Lancaster city street. The way roads corroded during this severe winter reminded her of the unknown effects of climate change. Secondly, Marlisa's congregation, East Chestnut Mennonite, has qualified for a \$100,000 grant to take asphalt out of their parking lot and put in a permeable system. She is pleased that the City of Lancaster is responding to its CSO problem with green solutions rather than more storage tanks.

Mike Curie is an environmental scientist who works with contaminated sites. He showed two pictures: some leaky old tanks he is working on right now and the lake that is being protected through his work. The lake is a salmon spawning ground with sockeye runs.

Jim Smith showed a photo of his backyard fire pit which is raised for wheelchair convenience. He enjoys backyard creation with family and friends.

Luke: Having four grandchildren visiting in the snow. Having grandchildren is a big motivation for creation care. Luke started a nut, berry and fruit orchard, agroforestry project. Planted several plants last Luke showed photo of US, with eastern half colder than usual, but western half and much of the world warmer.

3. **Chris Meyer**, a stewardship Investing Research Specialist at Everence spoke about socially responsible investing. Here, I am inserting a write-up I did for the MCCN website based on this input. More detailed notes available upon request.

Everence Shifts Toward Greener Investing

Divesting from fossil fuels has been much in the news in the past year or two. While it may not have resulted in the demise of oil companies, it *has* succeeded in opening up discussion about money, values and climate change. "Two years ago, I wished I could have been as engaged with climate change as I can be now," says Chris Meyer, an investment specialist with Everence, remarking on the increased demand for environmentally responsible investing. Everence is a Christian financial services organization affiliated with the Mennonite Church USA and other denominations.

Meyer spent over an hour with the Mennonite Creation Care Network Creation Care Council during their last face-to-face meeting in late March, leading the group in a lively discussion on socially responsible investing. Meyer points to the following examples of Everence's response to consumer demand for greener investments:

- In early 2014, the company announced that they had tightened their **environmental screening policy**. This resulted in Everence excluding about 150 more companies from the pool of investments their managers choose from.
- Meanwhile, Everence added the **Advantage Select High Impact Annuity** to its retirement offerings. Investors who own an Advantage Select Annuity have the peace of mind of knowing that 50% of their money is loaned to businesses making environmentally friendly improvements, socially engaged congregations and community development projects.
- More recently, in March 2014, Everence committed 3.5 million dollars to the auto industry's first ever **asset-backed green bond**. The money in this bond helps people get loans for energy-efficient vehicles.

Meyer himself models yet another kind of socially responsible investing: he's purchased strip-mined land in Ohio and is restoring it. Meyer showed MCCN council members a photograph of a tree-planting project on his land. Planting hardy evergreens is an inexpensive way to help the land recover. Meyer has been able to learn what works from his grandparents, Art and Jocene Meyer, who made a similar investment in the 1980s. His land is adjacent to theirs.

Saturday morning, April 29, 2014

1. Devotional: Luke focused on Psalm 29, which he called the "acts of God" passage. Psalm 29 uses the phrase, "the Lord's voice" seven times. The Lord's voice is heard over the waters and over the

wilderness. It unleashes fiery flames and convulses the oaks. This is a Psalm where God is present in violent nature. It concludes, “Let the Lord bless the people with peace.”

How would a person disconnected from nature understand this Psalm?

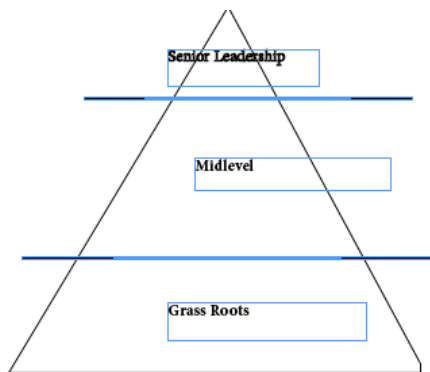
We also heard poetry from Wendell Berry’s recent collection, entitled *This Day: Collected and New Sabbath Poems*. One memorable phrase: “flowers embroider the ground.”

2. Discussion with Andre Gingerich Stoner

Andre works for MCUSA on interchurch relations and wholistic witness, His job includes peace and justice, church planting and relating to other denominations. He has also been a pastor at Kern Road.

Luke and Andre have been in discussion over the years regarding getting creation care into MCUSA’s objectives and the Purposeful Plan. More recently he has been our MCUSA link through the resolution process. How can we collaborate? How can we work with Peace and Justice Support Network?

Andre reflected on his past three years with MCUSA, the ways the system works and the ways change happens. Some of his examples related to Israel-Palestine issues, which are a priority to MCUSA.



Using a chart similar to the one at left, Andre noted that none of the three levels of leadership can create change on their own. Change happens when all three line up. Furthermore, you can lead an organization from ANYWHERE in the organization. Each level has its own strengths.

Top of pyramid: Access, visibility, positional power, no money, no wiggle room on controversial issues. Executive board has to figure out one answer to a problem.

Middle people are prime people: They are connected both upward and downward and can do more creative things. They have more wiggle room on controversial issues. They can have twenty different answers to a problem, and different ways of

doing things. Unfortunately they often don’t have staff time to provide people at the grass roots the connections they need to make things happen. In the MCUSA system, this latter role is sometimes provided by regional MCC staff.

People at the grass roots level have a lot of power, but need connections. Andre quoted MCUSA head, Ervin Stutzman as saying, “If seven young Mennonites care about this issue let’s act on it.” The downside of the grass roots is that tend to be ideological, not strategic. They often have wildly unrealistic ideas of what can be accomplished. They also need to learn that it is not necessary to be hostile to get things done. For example, if a group of students wants Everence to work on oil divestment, their best strategy might be to check in with Everence personnel every six months and ask how they are doing.

Questions and comments:

- Who functions at which of the three levels in the triangle? Where are colleges and universities? Where is MCCN in this model? It certainly has a grassroots component. How are the roots doing? Are they connected or feeling isolated?
- How do we help people understand that creation care is one of the 3-5 issues that we really need to be engaged with. How do we articulate why this issue matters more than many others?
- How do resolutions inform the folks at the top? How do they tie into goals, expectations, staffing?
- Do people at the top and middle levels “get” creation care?
- Even in a progressive congregation, many people still don’t see how creation care relates to faith. You cannot be too basic about this.
- How do we construct learning experiences for people? It takes a set of experiences, insights and relationships in order to care about an issue. For example, on the Israel-Palestine issue, people don’t get it unless they’ve been there. Conservative or liberal leanings don’t matter but experience does. If we were to sponsor a learning experience for Mennonite leaders, what would it look like?
- Quote from Richard Foster: “We tend to overestimate what we can do in one year, and underestimate what we can do in 10 years.”
- The MCUSA Convention deals more with the midlevel than the grass roots, in that the mid-level can afford to come because their jobs bring them.
- MCUSA should push the curriculum hard at Kansas City. Luke suggested we do something with session 5 on peace and creation care.

Advice from Andre:

- *What we know about Kansas City:* It will not be as themed as Phoenix. Learning experiences will be done differently and maybe not so much. Is there a 3-4 hour learning experience that could happen in KC? Running once? Running every day? Buzz it beforehand.
- Elizabeth Soto Albrect is moderator. Register the interest in delegate time with her and Ervin . Patty Shelly is incoming moderator and will also be involved. Key thing is to promote curriculum. Highlight content in the curriculum.
- You can’t be too BASIC about how you make those connections between creation care and Jesus.

- Hannah Heinzicker is working on workshops. Everence is a key link, institutionally. Communications staff from key agencies make lists of what kind of perspectives should be included. Everence will feed in workshop ideas.
- What is the next goal? Get it into the purposeful plan because that is what MCUSA has to answer to.
- At what point can you share important things happening with churches? Get congregations to write a 3-paragraph description in conference bulletins. Note that MCUSA has been doing a lot with blogs.
- Ervin Stutzman looks for church plants to visit. Where are the most creative things in creation care happening in the church? Who should visit them?
- *Jim:* There are many more grass roots people than upper management. If you can influence the bottom, it trickles up.
- *Greg:* Given the time constraints midlevel people feel, need to pitch what we have to offer as a gift we can do, not something they should do. Something positive and life-giving.
- *Janie:* Learning tour idea appeals.
- *Jennifer:* What if we think of it in terms of conservation instead of change? Are there times we are conserving something, not changing it?
- *Luke:* Beyond intractability.org shows the triangle Andre shared in more detail. It comes from John Paul Lederach.
- *Joanne:* I feel totally supported by the top level of MC Canada. Willard, Vic Theissen are totally onboard, though strapped for personnel. Luke says Ervin is supportive of creation care as well.
- Luke commented briefly on the likelihood of the MCUSA splitting over LGBT issues. Denominational structure may be revised. Recent conversations have suggested a loosening of relationships without splitting. Perhaps the Mennonite Church will function more like MCC, with multiple partners collaborating on issues they agree on.

3. Update on creation care curriculum:

Congregations piloting the curriculum March to May are:

College Mennonite, Goshen, IN

Waterford Mennonite, Goshen, IN

Joy Mennonite, Oklahoma City, OK

Lethbridge Mennonite Church, Lethbridge, AB

Summer users include:

Parkview Mennonite, Harrisonburg, VA

Berea Mennonite Church in Atlanta, adapt for children's camps

East Chestnut Mennonite Church, Lancaster, PA

Iglesia Evangelica Agape, Mountain Lake, MN

Feedback has been slow in coming, but seems largely positive.

4. Interesting climate change sites: Luke shared these.

- Earth wind map shows current wind patterns around the planet. Earth.nullschool.net
 - A page on the NOAA site shows the temperature history of any given location. <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cag/>
 - Also see NOAA climate.gov
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5. MCCN website: Janie and Jennifer showed improvements made to the website and described additional ideas in process, such as an expanded map that includes green agencies, businesses, and so on, and advertising by additional sponsors in the side panels.

Suggestions from the Council:

- Add *Kairos* to resources. They are doing watershed discipleship.
- The group liked the advertising idea and had suggestions for businesses that might want to advertise. Talk to Greg.
- Add *click here to explore our site*, as slab navs are not all that common, or replace it with drop down tabs across the top of the page.
- Check link on 100 Shades page make sure it is not going to mccn.lightsky.net.
- Say, "Provide curriculum feedback" instead of "Take the survey."
- Regarding shifting away from congregational pages to linking to congregation's website: Send a template and guidance for how to do a congregational creation care page. Send our logo to add to it.

Curriculum:

- Change pdfs to be interactive with functioning links.
- On the introductory curriculum page, spell out what circle questions are.
- Remember to change diversity of people in header photos.
- Offer prizes for curriculum feedback. Free tour at ML?
- Post sticky notes at the bottom of pdfs reminding people to give feedback.
- Make sure web blurbs are very accessible. Compare off-putting language in session 1 to inviting language in session 2. Keep vocabulary range small.

- Add a glossary of terms.
 - Byline should be on every session. This gives a sense of personableness and accountability.
 - Include information on our own watershed in bios.
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6. MC Canada Assembly, 2014:

Joanne will be:

- giving a workshop entitled Creation Care: Testing our Resolve.
- Willard said MC Canada should have a resolution too.
- Joanne will run this as a focus group to see what sort of resolution Canadians might like to create.

There will also be 10 minutes of assembly floor time for creation care when Joanne can present to

She will have a display, along with a white board headed, “I’m caring for creation by...”

She could print out the curriculum and have it in a 3-ring binder for people to look at.

Joanne receives more invitations to speak from churches than she can handle.

Luke noted that it is important to use our science background to communicate with people who are not scientists.

7. Sound in the Land Music Conference

Joanne has been working with Bryan and Mike Erb, another musician, to figure out how to bring together MennoFolk, the folk festival piece of the Sound in the Land event, and how to bring in the Songs of Place idea. They have almost finalized a list of musicians for the concert.

They want to launch Songs of Place at MennoFolk. Bryan will do workshops for sharing songs of place. People are invited to bring a song or food to these circles. After Bryan’s done a couple of these, he can make a toolkit. They see it more as an ongoing project rather than focusing on producing a CD. A friend provided free graphic design to give a visual identity to this project. Joanne showed the logos for MennoFolk and Songs of Place. Sharing of music would be through software programs like Sound Cloud, Band Camp.

8. Finances: Jim reported and provided a budget sheet (in file; see 00_MCCN BUDGET OVERVIEW.pdf) showing our budget from 2011-2014.

- He noted that asking the constituency for money has resulted in an uptick in giving. Income has come in through foundation accounts, congregations, individuals.
- One thing we don’t have in a clear, outlined way is what it is actually costing to run MCCN. The total budget is quite different from the on-paper amount, as it does not include Jim’s, Luke’s,

Janie's or Jennifer's time. Staff time is around \$20-30,000, so the total budget is more like \$50,000/yr.

- President Larry Miller and VP Jim Alvarez liked the direction that the resolution has gone. Larry is retiring in August.
 - Everence is committed to providing for translation of the curriculum, when it happens.
 - PJCS has a more comprehensive budget of \$80-90,000, with about half of its funding from donations and half from MMN. PCJS has budget surpluses and gives them out as matching grants for local small projects, such as quilting a peace banner, making guns into welded art, or a housing loan fund. See criteria and application form online. These are awarded once per year.
 - <http://www.pjsn.org/Pages/default.aspx> Could we do something similar at some point?
 - *Online giving:* MCUSA is giving up their online giving model. We will need to transition to Vanco. This is the premier resource for faith based groups. Unlike Paypal, Vanco is set up to work with churches and donations. We will be working to get set up with Vanco shortly. Joanne observed that this may work better for Canadians, who would feel less at home when the donation button goes to MCUSA.
 - Greg commented again on commercial sponsors, affirming this idea. Ads could rotate in and out. It is important to get Google Analytics going in order to be able to tell sponsors number of hits.
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9. Small group work: We broke into groups to explore the following areas. Notes from the whole group's responses to what the smaller groups presented are integrated here.

- A. Advancing Environmental Theology**
- B. Building and Supporting Regional Conference Connections**
- C. Planning a Leadership Learning Event**

10. Working Group A: Advancing Environmental Theology

Jim, Janie, Luke

Desired outcomes:

- Theological development that inspires or creates a desire to do creation care.
- Opening up of a variety of perspectives from within the church, including people of color.
- Build an understanding of environmental stewardship as witness. When we say peace witness in the church, people know what we are talking about. Have we understood creation care in the same way? Help people see how an environmental and peace witness are linked.

Desired Activities:

- Seminary classrooms with environmental courses, integrated themes.
- Books, articles publications.
- Conferences and symposia with environmental theological themes.
- Linking grad students working on environmental themes with each other and the Church.

- Connecting grad students and research funding.
- Building a network of faculty.
- MCCN-sponsored publications.

Comments and Questions:

- Who are all the scholars doing practical or theological work on creation care?
- Anabaptist Scholars Network has an online database.
- Ask faculty level scholars are they interested in connecting with each other?
- How would we include practitioners in this list?
- The Christian Reformed are at the top of having worked theologically on environmental ethics. Steven Bouma-Prediger is a case in point.
- Evangelical Environmental Network does not appear to have done a whole lot with theology. Website has not increased in terms of resource list for a long time. It is hard to find much there.
- Luke remarked on AMBS joining the Seminary Alliance that Matthew and Nancy Sleeth created. This has increased interest in connecting with Merry Lea.
- Institute of Mennonite Studies will produce a publication from AMBS' Rooted and Grounded conference. They may be able to do something like that annually.
- Institute of Mennonite Studies will be producing something from the AMBS conference. They may be able to do something like that annually.

11. Working Group B: Supporting Regional Conference Connections

Joanne, Dave, Mike

Joanne described how she recruited her regional reps and what we want from them:

1. provide support for council members, representing us at events
2. be eyes on the ground in their region

Strategy for how to reconnect with reps:

- Get them to help us figure out who are the contact people in their region (mid level people).
- Encourage them to connect with local conferences or agencies.
- Have a mobile display that people can take with them.
- These folks could organize regional gatherings
- They should be invited to our regional events, along with the list of contact people that they have helped us relate to.
- Connect to schools

Should we try to do this in the US?

- People with high energy but no connection to the system may not be that helpful.
- Are there people within the liaison group who would be interested in this role?
- Could it be organized around population centers where there is potential for synergy?
- This goes hand in glove with a leadership gathering. Not sure which comes first. Joanne says a gathering would have been helpful, as she hasn't even met all of her reps face to face.
- Luke suggested inviting regional reps to MCCN's annual meeting.

How useful is Facebook for us? You need a lot of time to keep Facebook going, with postings at least once a day. It is a great way to connect a network you already have, but hard to generate from scratch. Note that Marginal Mennonites has an active Facebook page. Use our own Facebook networks to mention MCCN.

The three groups are encouraged to continue to flesh out their conversations and communicate with all of us as to how to flesh out these ideas. How do we couple imagination and realism?

12. Working Group C: Planning a Leadership Learning Event

Marlisa, Greg, Jennifer

Greg mentioned Food, Faith and Farming conference. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary has offered to host it. We could co-sponsor. Are looking for a more diverse set of planners. Interface MCCN membership with Food, Faith and Farming.

Desired Outcomes:

- Boost the importance of creation care church-wide. Help people understand that this is a critical issue that pervades all other areas rather than competing with them.
- Give people face-to-face connections.
- Bring together both biblical analysis and field trips.
- Offer things that people can take home and replicate.
- Start a lot of good things from one experience, or small experiences in many venues.

What kinds of events might we plan?

Target the following people for “by invitation” bioregional gatherings with the purpose of training leaders in the theme of creation care.

- conference leaders
- liaisons
- people who do resourcing for congregations
- how would we layer who to invite for the best strategic impact?

Connect across U.S.-Canadian border as well.

Models: Ched Myers’ Watershed Discipleship Roundtable, November 2013

Models: Greg mentioned the Food, Faith and Farming conference which will likely move away from Laurelville and seek a more diverse set of planners. MCCN could co-sponsor. Interface MCCN membership with Food, Faith and Farming.

Models: Note Albuquerque’s RE-Placing Ourselves and look at what they did and what came out of it.

Models: Jim pointed out webinar opportunities.

Ideas for reaching out to church leadership:

Offer something when people are already gathered. If we are looking at leadership people, they already have a lot of demands and are already away a lot. We need to be at stuff they are already attending,

providing two to three-hour exposures. Marlisa noted the Multi-staff Leadership Summit scheduled for Laurelville, November 2014.

Potential slots: What about right before or after convention? When could we piggyback on top of someone's board meeting? Ask if we could do some kind of exposure. Often people meet at an airport hotel, but we could do a watershed experience even within a hotel. This opens up evocative possibilities.

What could we show church leadership?

- Can we offer practical, life-giving things in the midst of this cloud of church imploding?
- *High impact food stories:* What if we told stories about food while people were eating?
- *Green tours* can be an eye-opener: green roofs, LEED buildings, institutional landscaping.
- *Offer a walk* around Merry Lea or another place. How do you learn about species on your property?
- *Show how creation care has been missional.* People at Bally have come to the church through the community garden.

- *Nodes of pain:* Help people feel environmental pain through specific cases.
 - mountaintop removal
 - electronic waste
 - *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry* Native American experiencesAnywhere we go in the country, we could find regional examples of environmental degradation.

- This is not about one big trip, this is about bringing the discussion of creation care to every single meeting.

- What if we would look ahead to every place executive board needs to be in next year? Find nearby sites of environmental degradation to point execs to. Also acknowledge we are meeting on the land of a specific group of indigenous people.

- Provide pastoral care for executive board through retreats, cards and prayers.

- *Green Menno idea:* Post Mennos in green T-shirts at convention, similar to the pink Mennos. They could have climate change signs and pass out calming mint as aromatherapy.

Ideas for a Grass Roots Event at Merry Lea:

- Greg's idea for a workshop: Talk about strategic ways to discern whether a community garden is right for your congregation. Before you put one in, how do you think through it? Is it missional, for others, or for yourselves? Do a lot of thinking about congregational dynamics, mission, etc. How can we take the garden person seriously? What support is needed? What scale is appropriate?
- Would be important to do good work with Bible study.
- Stories from congregations, stories from scripture, tools.
- How does one deal with the biotic community?
- Hold a workshop introducing the MCCN curriculum

- Have congregations who did *Every Creature Singing* come to talk about how it went with their congregations.
 - Cover food and water.
 - Collect really powerful stories.
 - Luke could do a workshop on leadership in the congregation
 - Teach biological assessment
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Final thoughts: Remember our list from last year on how we hope the Church will be different?

- How do we sustain the network over time?
 - Is budget sustainable? How would we make it more sustainable?
 - We need staff time in Canada.
 - As we build a stronger and stronger network, there will be more people willing to go to bat for the creation care network if it can no longer be run in the way we have, with support from Merry Lea and Everence.
 - One advantage of being slim is that we do not need funding for a fulltime staff person to survive.
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Meeting dates: Dave HW suggested that we add a day to our annual meetings to allow time for visiting Merry Lea or inviting guests. Suggestions were Erica Littlewolf, Willard Metzger. Presently, we will block our calendars for an extra day. We will meet virtually twice and see if we still want to meet an extra day.

Virtual meetings: **Thursday, September 4, 2014, 7 to 9 p.m.**
 Thursday, January 8, 2015, 7 to 9 p.m.

Face to face meeting: **6 p.m., March 12 to evening of March 14, 2015** Pi day!

Reward for reading this far: [Plastic Bag Humor](#)